

# Research Strategies for Adoptees

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Webinar—31 March 2022

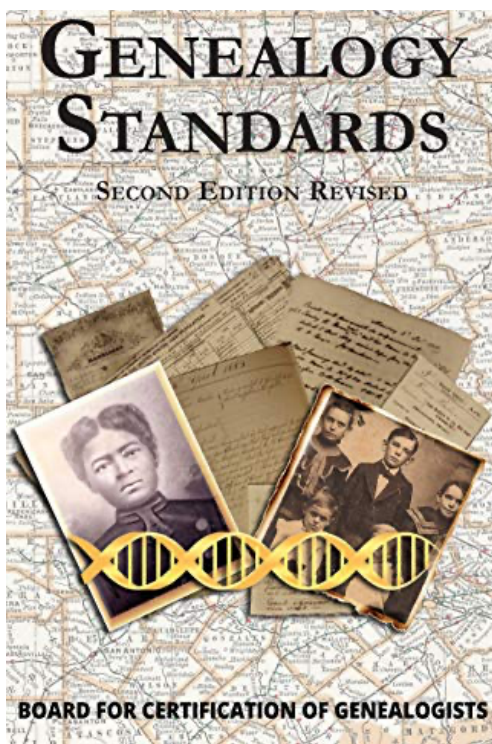
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Adoptee Research is challenging, requiring GPS labyrinth navigation. Research strategies to uncover birth parents include discovering record accessibility, understanding the laws (present and past), leveraging family stories, and diving into DNA.

## Researcher Considerations

Researching families introduces complexities that may impact various individuals that share a kinship. Ethics awareness and privacy considerations for historical and modern-day research must be treated with careful and thoughtful precautions. Due to the sensitive nature of performing adoption research, it is essential to follow guiding genealogical principles to get the research right. Following the Genealogical Proof Standard will show the way:



Board for Certification of Genealogists *Genealogy Standards* second ed. revised, (Nashville: Ancestry, 2021): 1-3.

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## Research Preparation

Spending time to pre-plan will aid in successfully meeting your research objective. Start with a defined question you want to answer. Then create a list of several sources that will most likely answer your research objective.

To do that, gain an understanding of the locality you desire to research. What records are available? [Hint: Not all records are online!]

Research the statutes which dictate what records were created and where the documents are accessed. Seek to understand record availability and the laws of the time and place you are researching. Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act, 1851 was one of the first in the country, and others followed and morphed over time.

Some resources to aid in understanding the laws for the time and place you are researching:

- American Adopt Congress outlines record access and the laws.<sup>2</sup>
  - Consider if the records are open, limited access, or closed
  - Are there mutual consent directories?
- Child Welfare Gateway contains downloadable articles, publications, resources, and tools<sup>3</sup>
- Confidential Intermediaries
- FamilySearch Wiki outlines some resources and provides links to the US states wiki articles<sup>4</sup>

New York adoption Law changed 1 January 2020, allowing adoptee original unsealed birth certificate access.<sup>5</sup>

Create and work on your plan! Adapt the plan as you find more information. Be flexible!

## Outside the box sources to consider

- Adoption petitions
- Agency Records
- Census Records
- Church Records
  - Reputed (proven)
  - Imputed (doesn't accept)
- Vital Records

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2. *American Adopt Congress* [www.AmericanAdoptionCongress.org](http://www.AmericanAdoptionCongress.org)

3. *Child Welfare Gateway* [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

4. "United States Adoption Research, wiki, *FamilySearch* ([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United\\_States\\_Adoption\\_Research](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Adoption_Research) : 1 March 2022).

5. "Updated Info on New York's New Law," *Adoptee Rights Law Center* (<https://adopteerrightslaw.com/updated-info-new-york-adoptee-rights-law/> : 1 March 2022).

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- Birth
  - Amended Birth Records
- Marriage
- Death
- Court Records
  - Legislative Records
  - Guardianships
  - Bastardy bonds
  - Name Changes
  - Orphan Court Records
  - Probate & Family Court Records
  - Surrogate Court Records
- Newspapers
- Orphanage & Asylum
- Orphan Train Riders
- Overseers of the Poor
- Almshouse Records
- Medical School Records
- Undertaker Records
- Warnings out
- Lunacy & Charity
- Homes for Unwed Mothers
- Catholic Charities

Watch for terms such as “Next of Friend” or children aged 14+ who may have had a say in their adoption process.

## Genetic Tools – DNA

DNA is a tool to break down adoptee brick walls. It is recommended to work with experienced researchers to understand matches and correlate with documentary evidence to determine biological connections.<sup>6</sup>

Tests and testing companies to consider:

- Y-DNA – only at FTDNA (Only Males can test)
- mtDNA– only at FTDNA (Males and Females can test)
- Autosomal DNA– Ancestry, 23&Me, LivingDNA, My Heritage, FTDNA (Males and Females can test)

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6. “DNA testing for adoptees,” *ISOGG* wiki, ([https://isogg.org/wiki/DNA\\_testing\\_for\\_adoptees](https://isogg.org/wiki/DNA_testing_for_adoptees): 1March 2022).

## Additional Resources

Albert Y. H. Lo, Harold D. Grotevant & Ruth G. McRoy (2019) Ethical Considerations in Adoption Research: Navigating Confidentiality and Privacy Across the Adoption Kinship Network, *Adoption Quarterly*, 22:1, 75-93, DOI: [10.1080/10926755.2018.1488328](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2018.1488328)

Brace, C.L.(1872). *The life of the street rats*. In J.E. Hansan, Charles Loring Brace (June 19, 1826 – August 11, 1890): Congregational minister, child welfare advocate, founder of the New York Children's Aid Society and organizer of the Orphan's Train.

Cheri Acierno and Alfinding aid, New-York Historical Society Museum & Library, <http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/nyhs/childrensaidsociety/dscref4.html>.

National Orphan Trail Complex. <https://orphantraindepot.org>

Louisiana Orphan Train Museum. [www.laorphantrainmuseum.com](http://www.laorphantrainmuseum.com)

*International Society of Genetic Genealogy (ISSOG)*, encyclopedia wiki. <https://isogg.org/wiki> : 2022. [Articles, educational guides for navigation of testing and using genetics as a research tool]

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. <https://childwelfare.gov> : 2022. [Articles, downloadable PDF handouts, Laws, and Policies]

\_\_\_\_\_. *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/?CWIGFunctionsaction=statestatutes:main.getResults> : 2022 [State Statutes Search]